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CONTRIBUTING TO GLOBAL DEBATES AND EVENTS

Note by the Executive Secretary

In its resolution 1998/46, the Economic and Social Council recognized the dual role of the regional commissions as regional outposts of the United Nations and as part of their respective institutional landscape. With regard to the former, ECOSOC stressed the importance of linking more effectively the activities of the commissions with the overall activities of the Organization in the economic and social sectors and emphasized the role given to the regional commissions in the preparations for and follow-up to major United Nations conferences.

ECE member countries and its secretariat have responded to this challenge and will continue to do so. The interface is important for ECE member countries as it provides an opportunity for their common views to be communicated to global fora and to non-ECE member countries.

The report below provides information on contributions made by the Commission with respect to the process leading up to the 2000 review of the Beijing Platform for Action. It also briefs the Commission on the contribution made by the ECE secretariat to UNCTAD X. Looking ahead, the report speaks of the contribution ECE could make in respect of follow-up action to the International Year of Older Persons.

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ECE member countries have expressed their appreciation for the work of the ECE secretariat which has demonstrated its capacity to organize fruitful meetings related to global events even in areas for which it does not have an in-house expertise. This is, however, time consuming and resource demanding. Even when extra-budgetary resources are made available, regular staff must, de rigueur, devote considerable time to such efforts, resulting in a situation where other work is neglected.

Taking into account the above paragraphs, it may be time for all concerned to reflect on how, in future, contributions by ECE to global events can be dealt with in a less ad hoc manner, perhaps by allocating an additional post to the Office of the Executive Secretary.

I. ECE REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING ON THE 2000 REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

1. As part of the Beijing +5 global review, the ECE Regional Preparatory Meeting on the 2000 Review of Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action was held from 19 to 21 January 2000. The event gathered approximately 1000 participants comprising representatives of 51 ECE member States and some 250 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), representatives of other organizations of the United Nations system and specialized agencies, as well as other intergovernmental organizations.

2. The meeting was structured around five substantive themes: women and the economy, violence against women and girls, women and girls in armed conflict situations, women in power and decision-making, and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.

3. As evidenced by statements made at the meeting and subsequent feedback, the meeting can be considered a success. Achievements worth mentioning include:

(a) the adoption of the set of agreed conclusions by the governments which attended the Meeting. For each of the five themes, the conclusions spell out the key areas for action to be undertaken with specific recommendations and responsible actors clearly specified. Through intensive consultations between the ECE secretariat, member States and partner institutions prior to the meeting, it was possible to prepare a well developed and highly structured draft of the conclusions to be tabled at the meeting, which facilitated their smooth and rapid adoption.

(b) the significant participation of NGOs in all the components of the meeting, namely their representation in the panels, their participation in the open debate and their role in the

finalization of the agreed conclusions. This was made possible through the combination of a liberal NGO accreditation process with clear participation rules for NGOs.

(c) a solid preparatory process by the NGOs which started at the national and sub-regional levels and culminated in the NGO Working Session, held on 17-18 January 2000. The session was convened by the NGO Committee on the Status of Women and the NGO Working Group for Women in the ECE region. The NGOs organized themselves in caucuses around the five themes of the ECE meeting and elected delegates from each caucus to present their position to the meeting. At this Working Session, subregional reports were submitted of NGO coalitions from Canada, the United States of America, the European Union, the Central and East European Countries, and the Commonwealth of Independent States. As part of the programme of the Working Session, 17 workshops were also organized on various issues related to the five themes of the ECE Meeting. On the basis of recommendations from the workshops and the caucus meetings, proposals were formulated to complement the ECE Draft Agreed Conclusions. Many, though not all, of these proposals were accepted by the participating Governments and included in the final adopted conclusions. It was decided to annex the report of the NGO Working Session to the report of the ECE Meeting in order to show the NGO proposals emerging from each caucus and the extent to which they were agreed to, thereby ensuring full transparency to the process.

(d) the close cooperation of the ECE secretariat with four major partners that are most active in the region on the themes addressed, namely the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Council of Europe and the European Commission. All of them, according to their respective membership and areas of competence, made their expertise available in all the preparations of the Meeting, and were part of the secretariat support staff for the finalization of the agreed conclusions at the Meeting itself. Furthermore, UNDP and UNIFEM provided financial support which made it possible for a large number of NGOs from ECE countries with economies in transition to be present. They also greatly facilitated the active participation of the governmental and non-governmental representatives in the deliberations of the meeting. The experience has resulted in the establishment of excellent working relationships between ECE and the said organizations which will in turn facilitate possible future collaboration.

4. The Meeting underlined the ability of ECE to offer a region-wide forum for discussion of social and economic issues and to act as an interface between Governments and NGOs. It also provided an impetus for accelerating gender mainstreaming in the activities of the Commission, in particular as they relate to countries with economies in transition, and steps are being taken to materialize this development.

5. The Commission may wish to record its full support for the outcome agreed to at the Meeting, which constitutes the input of the ECE region to the global review process culminating in the Special Session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century" in June 2000.

II. UNCTAD X

6. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Mr. R. Ricupero, invited the Executive Secretaries of the five regional commissions to UNCTAD X to participate in an interactive debate on "globalization, regionalization and development". The debate, to which Mr. Ricupero contributed, was moderated by Mr. Enrique Iglesias, Chairman of the IDB and former Executive Secretary of ECLAC. It addressed two topics:

(a) The impact of globalization on each region (trade, investments and consequences of the recent crises);

(b) Regionalization as a way of preparing countries for globalization with a subsidiary question on what makes a subregional arrangement effective or not.

7. From the debate on the first topic it emerged that in Europe and Latin America regionalisation is proceeding faster than globalization. In other words, the share of regional trade in the total trade of these two regions increases. In addition, the share of FDI made by western Europe in the whole of Europe increases. This is not the case in Africa and the Middle East. In Asia it differs from one sub-region to another. Two lessons can be drawn from this (i) regional governance matters, (ii) concerning globalization, a distinction should be made between what represents a trend and what is a political agenda.

8. The debate on the second topic showed the dynamism of sub-regional groupings and highlighted both the importance of political will and the construction of technical instruments common to those countries participating in a given grouping. Sub-regional groupings were seen as a means of preparing countries for the challenges of global markets and as potential protection against the risks of globalization.

9. The substantive papers prepared by each regional commission were available in advance and will be published with an introduction by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD.

10. In addition, ECE circulated a brief note on trade facilitation showing cooperation through CEFACT with other regional commissions, the World Trade Organization and UNCTAD.

11. Overall, the initiative of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD should be praised as it allowed facts and ideas to be reviewed and showed the specificity of regions which is one of the main "raisons d'être"of the regional commissions.

III. FOLLOW-UP TO THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF OLDER PERSONS: ELABORATION OF A REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REVISED INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING

12. General Assembly Resolution A/54/24 "Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: a society for all ages" calls for a revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, encourages regional initiatives to provide input into this process and takes note with appreciation of the offer of the Government of Germany to host a regional ministerial conference on ageing under the aegis of the ECE in 2002.

13. The above should be considered against a background of demographic changes, which have begun to change dramatically the landscape of our societies. It is well recognized that the main demographic issue of the twenty-first century will be ageing and that the future prospects of societies and states depend on their capacity to take the opportunities and master the challenges presented by population ageing.

14. Questions related to ageing are of great importance in the context of economic and social development and will require enhanced regional cooperation: in the ECE region it is worth noting that while the total population in the ECE countries is projected to increase by 60 % by the year 2050, the number of people aged 65 years and older is expected to multiply three times faster. ECE member countries may wish therefore to promote cooperation regarding questions related to ageing and the status of older persons, as well as providing assistance to countries with economies in transition within the framework of the ECE.

15. It is therefore recommended that the Commission:

(a) decide to convene a regional ministerial conference on ageing in 2002, in order to develop a regional implementation strategy for the revised International Plan of Action on Ageing,

(b) accept with appreciation the offer of the Government of Germany to host such conference, which would be held in Berlin in September 2002, and

(c) agree to the proposed framework for preparations as outlined below.

Framework for Preparations

16. Although the conference will be held in 2002, preparations must begin sufficiently in advance in order to ensure a successful process and outcome. The following steps are proposed:

2000-2001

- A first seminar, to be convened by the Executive Secretary, would identify the issues and policy challenges related to population ageing that are of particular importance to the ECE region. On this basis, the Executive Secretary would propose to ECE member countries the main issues to be addressed by the conference.

- An Ad Hoc Informal Meeting of the Commission would subsequently approve the main themes of the conference;

- Expert seminars would then be organized to address each of these themes from a substantive point of view.

First half of 2002

- Based on the outcome of the seminars, the secretariat would prepare a draft of the regional implementation strategy of the revised International Plan of Action on Ageing, to be finalized and adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid, April 2002).

September 2002

- The revised draft would be submitted to the ECE ministerial conference for adoption.

17. In order to promote synergies between the preparatory process for the World Assembly on Ageing and the one for the ECE ministerial conference on ageing, close cooperation will be developed:

(a) at the intergovernmental level between the preparatory events organized respectively by ECOSOC's Commission on Social Development and by the Economic Commission for Europe;

(b) at the secretariat level between the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) in New York and ECE.

18. The entire preparatory process would be monitored by the Commission, through reports to the Ad Hoc Informal Meeting and to the Commission's session in 2001. The Geneva-based experts could act as a consultative group for any matter requiring specific consideration.

Financing of the Process

19. Although a certain amount of substantive support is available within the ECE secretariat, notably from the Population Activities Unit and the Statistical Division, it is important to note that, given the magnitude of the work involved, additional resources would be needed in order to ensure the preparatory process and the holding of the meeting itself.

20. A trust fund which would provide a mechanism for the receipt of voluntary contributions needed to finance additional support staff as well as expert seminars and other preparatory meetings will therefore be established/identified as appropriate. Once this has been done, member States and other interested organizations will be invited to contribute as soon as possible to allow the process to proceed in a timely and planned manner. In this connection, the secretariat notes with appreciation that the Government of Germany has already expressed its willingness to make a significant contribution and it is hoped that other donors will follow suit.